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SUBJECT: Government of Slovenia Publicly Defends Decision to Deploy Trainers to Iraq

REF: A) LJUBLJANA 023; B) LJUBLJANA 028

1. Summary: Media reaction to Slovenia's decision to contribute four soldiers to the NATO Training Mission in Iraq (NTM-I) has been intense, dominating headlines since the January 12 announcement by Foreign Minister Rupel and Defense Minister Erjavec. The opposition and its media sympathizers had made clear in the past that they would try to exact a price from Prime Minister Jansa's Government when and if it decided to send soldiers to Iraq. The opposition is now making good on its earlier threat by engaging in a heavy media offensive arguing that the decision reflects kowtowing to American pressure and will make Slovenia a target for terrorist attacks in the future. Jansa and Erjavec have adroitly and forcefully rebutted the opposition's arguments and provided statesmanlike leadership by arguing that the decision reflects Slovenia's commitment to NATO and the international community while serving Slovenia's own security interests. An initial poll immediately following the January 12 announcement by the government showed that 62 percent of the public was against deployment of Slovene troops vs. 29 percent in favor. While there has not yet been a second poll, the telephone call-in survey during a January 19 evening talk show gave 52 percent support in favor of deployment. End Summary.

MOVING BEYOND TALK TO OPERATIONAL PLANNING

2. As the debate continues, the GOS is moving forward with operational preparations for deployment. Slovenian Chief of Defense, Major General Ladislav Lipic, told the press that the Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) would coordinate with the NTM-I Commander to fill appropriate billets in Iraq. Lipic said the SAF would offer instructors for armored units, personnel, intelligence and logistics. (Note: MOD Defense Planning Section Director Tomaz Savsek told PolMiloff January 20 that these suggested positions would be sent to SHAPE early in the next week. End Note.) Lipic stressed that the soldiers would be stationed and work at a base where there have been no incidents yet, while cautioning that "relative safety is relative indeed." His comments correct the impression created by some media commentators that Slovene soldiers would be involved in combat operations where their lives would be in constant danger.

JANSA AND FORMER PM ROP MAKE THEIR CASE TO THE PRESS

3. The public affairs strategy of the opposition has focused on three principal arguments: that they were not consulted; that Slovenia will become more of a target for terrorists as a result, and that this is a radical departure from previous policy reflecting the current government's kowtowing to U.S. pressure. Prime Minister Jansa scheduled a press conference to counter these arguments on January 18, arguing that the decision reflected Slovenia's commitment to NATO, its own constitution, and international treaties, and emphasizing that he was standing firmly behind the decision and taking full responsibility for its consequences. Referencing UN Security Council Resolution 1546 and NATO's Istanbul summit, Jansa forcefully and eloquently made the case for Slovenia's need to play a role on the international stage by living up to its commitments to NATO and the UN. There was no increase in risk to Slovenia's security, he added.

MEDIA AND ACADEMIA ENTER THE FRAY

4. As expected, the left-of-center press has come out swinging. One of the more radical commentators even drew a parallel between the World War II collaboration of Slovenia's Home Guard with the Nazis and the current government's decision to contribute forces in an article entitled, "Nach Baghdad, nach Baghdad." While this talk probably plays well to a smaller body of hard-core critics of U.S. policy, it was not likely to have a significant impact on public opinion. In a similar, but less dramatic vein, the foreign affairs editor of Dnevnik opined that, "from the moment that a Slovene instructor steps on Iraq soil, Slovenia will no longer count itself among those countries that were repressed at the hands of other nations, but among those that have helped repress others." Janko Lorenci comments in Delo (Jan. 17): "... [The decision] would be understandable ... if the Americans

strongly pressured Slovenia or if Slovenia expected a huge profit. Neither is the case. PM Jansa is more fascinated with America ... He is fascinated with America's power rather than its culture, science and people..." Former Minister of Defense Anton Grizold emphasized in an interview for daily Vecer (Jan. 16) that he "does not see any positive sides of our joining the operation in Iraq. ...Four instructors have only symbolic meaning ... and Iraq is not among EU's foreign policy and security priorities.

Afghanistan is NATO's priority at the moment..."

15. Others have made the case for the government's decision, saying "it is high time for the EU to assume its share of responsibility for the future of Iraq. ... a stable Iraq is the EU's foreign policy and security priority. ..." (Borut Grgic, Director of the Institute for Strategic Studies), and "it would be a extremely perverse logic if.in the name of protesting against the Americans, that we left the Iraqis to their own fate." (Matej Makarovic, sociologist). Professor of Defense Studies Ljubica Jelusic writes how a likely American withdrawal will surely involve Slovenia further through a European Union-led effort in Iraq so the government would do well to prepare the public for that now. She also writes that ".it is not correct to frighten the Slovene public with Iraq and with the soldier's mission to Iraq. It would be more correct to speak out about the many other forms of threats that they hide from the public because they could destabilize our high public, however phantom, sense of security."

16. Post is working with USNATO and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to encourage media opportunities with NATO officials to speak about the NTM-I mission, to arrange opportunities for Slovene media to visit the training facilities in al-Rustamiyah, and to engage policy specialists and the think tank community. The Slovene Government is standing firm on its decision and is making the case to the public. We must do what we can to assist.

COLEMAN

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